NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
TABOR CREEK FIRE (X-231)
BLM/EK/PL2001/062

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Supplement Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL2001/062, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Decision:

It is my decision to implement the Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan (NFRP) Supplement as described in the Environmental Assessment for the Tabor Creek Fire BLM/PL2001/062. Over 3,503 acres of public rangeland managed by the Bureau of Land Management Elko Field Office and 3,501 private acres were burned during this fire. Approximately 2,017 acres of the burned BLM public land acres will be rehabilitated by planting of multiple species seed mixtures. Approximately 11 miles of dozer line will be rehabilitated. Approximately 20 miles of new permanent and temporary fence will be constructed to facilitate grazing closures and prevent grazing of a burnt aspen stand. One flood hazard warning and 25 non-motorized use signs will be installed near the Tabor Creek Campground. The 31 miles of dozer and fence lines and 36 acres proposed for drill seeding will be inventoried for cultural resources. Two small (less than 1 acre) infestations of Canada thistle in the Pole Creek drainage will be chemically treated and monitoring of the burn for further infestation of noxious weeds will be conducted. Monitoring of the fenced aspen stand will occur over 3 years. Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on monitoring and achievement of site specific resource objectives.

Rationale:

Implementation of the proposed action described in the NFRP Supplement EA for the Tabor Creek Fire will protect soils in the burned area, including preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce potential invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock and wildlife; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

The Wells Resource Management Plan is silent for the proposed action. The proposed action is consistent with the objectives of the RMP and is consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible

Monitoring:

Post-treatment monitoring studies will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments and to determine the time frame for reopening lands for grazing.

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Helen Hankins
Elko Field Office

Date

NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
TABOR CREEK FIRE (X-231)
BLM/EK/PL-2001-062

Introduction:

This Supplement Environmental Assessment (EA) tiers to the Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NFRPEA) BLM/EK/PL2000/037. The Proposed Action includes NFRPEA Treatment # 1 (Grazing closure), 2 (Planting of multiple species seed mixtures), 4 (Erosion or sediment control structures), 5 (Dozer line rehabilitation), 8 (Invasive, nonnative weed species control), and 10 (Cultural resource site stabilization and protection). The format of this Supplement EA follows the outline in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook, BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1 dated 7/27/99 and is consistent with the draft Interagency Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Handbook, Version 1.0, dated 6/14/01.

List of Preparers:

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Project Area Description:

A. Fire Description:

The Tabor Creek Fire was started by a lightning strike and was reported on July 25, 2001. It burned over 3,503 acres of public land and 3,501 acres of private land. Two grazing allotments were affected, the Black Butte and HD Allotments. The fire impacted 9% of the Black Butte Allotment and less than one percent of the HD Allotment. No structures were burned.

B. Vegetation and Soil Description:

The burned area ranges in elevation from 6,200 ft to 8,400 ft. In the lower elevations of the burn the vegetation was comprised of Basin big sagebrush, mountain big sagebrush, and Wyoming big sagebrush with an understory of bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue. At higher elevations bitterbrush, serviceberry, mountain mahogany, quaking aspen, and limber pine were found in conjunction with the above plant community.

Mountain slopes range from 15-50 percent. Soils range from gravelly loam to very gravelly loam and are moderately drained to well drained. Permeability is slow to very slow and runoff is rapid. Potential water erosion is moderate and potential wind erosion is slight. Fan piedmont remnants range from 4-15 percent. Soils range from very gravelly loam to gravelly silt loams and are well drained. Permeability is slow to very slow and runoff is medium. Potential erosion from water and wind is slight. These soils are made up of Hydrologic Group C and D. Group C soils have slow infiltration rates and slow rates of water transmission while Group D soils have very slow infiltration rates and slow rates of water transmission. The soils after the fire were not hydrophobic.

Proposed Project Treatments:

A. Revegetation:

1. Wildlife aerial seeding:

Approximately 1,540 acres of the Black Butte Allotment would be aerially seeded with Basin big sagebrush and an additional 173 acres of the Black Butte Allotment would be aerially seeded with Wyoming big sagebrush. The purpose of the seeding would be to provide forage for livestock and wildlife, particularly critical winter range forage for antelope and mule deer. If possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds.

2. Rangeland drill/aerial seeding:

Approximately 36 acres of the Black Butte Allotment would be drill seeded with a mixture of bluebunch wheatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass, and Indian ricegrass. The purpose of the seeding would be to provide forage for livestock and wildlife, particularly critical winter range forage for antelope and mule deer, to stabilize the soils immediately adjacent to Pole Creek, and to reduce the potential for the invasion of invasive, nonnative weed species.

3. Watershed aerial seeding:

Approximately 268 acres of the Black Butte Allotment would be aerially seeded with a watershed seed mix consisting of intermediate wheatgrass and thickspike wheatgrass in order to stabilize exposed banks and reduce soil erosion. If possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in

germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds.

4. Monitoring to detect noxious weed invasion of burned areas:

Two small (less than 1 acre) infestations of Canada thistle in the Pole Creek drainage would be chemically treated. If further noxious weed infestations are detected after fire rehabilitation efforts, appropriate Integrated Pest Management (IPM) control measures would be implemented to control the invasion. In particular, any disturbed dozer lines and adjacent areas would be targeted for this noxious weed monitoring and subsequent treatment if weeds are detected.

5. Aspen Monitoring

Monitoring of aspen regeneration in the proposed fenced aspen area would occur for a period of 3 years or until the trees reach an average height of 7 feet. This monitoring would be necessary to determine if any future protective measures or management strategies would be needed to maintain or enhance the aspen stand.

B. Structures:

1. Fencing:

Approximately 9.5 miles of new permanent fence and 9.8 miles of temporary fence would be constructed to allow closure of seeded areas to grazing for a period to be determined by post-rehabilitation monitoring. These fences would be needed to protect the proposed seeding treatments and to allow for vegetation to become reestablished. In addition, one aspen stand was identified as potentially needing an exclosure to aid in the successful reestablishment of the aspen clone. About 1/4 mile to 2 miles of permanent fence would be needed to construct this aspen exclosure. This clone is in an area easily accessible to livestock and the exclosure is necessary to protect the highly palatable regeneration.

C. Erosion Control Treatments:

1. Dozer line rehabilitation:

Approximately 11.1 miles of dozer lines would be rehabilitated by pushing back berms, regrading disturbed areas, and drill or aerial seeded with crested wheatgrass and Siberian wheatgrass to reduce erosion and encourage revegetation.

D. Site Preparation: None

E Other:

1. Cultural resource inventories:

Cultural resource inventories would be conducted along the approximately 11 miles of dozer lines, 20 miles of fence lines, and 36 acres of land proposed for drill seeding. These inventories would identify any cultural resources that might need to be protected during rehabilitation treatments.

2. Flood hazard warning sign:

A flood hazard warning sign would be placed at the turn off for Pole Creek off of the main road to warn hunters and recreationalists of possible mudflow dangers (T.40N., R.61E., section 7).

3. Campground rehabilitation signs:

Approximately 25 signs discouraging motorized use of the area would be installed along 1.5 miles of the burn line adjacent to the Tabor Creek campground road and spur route. If route proliferation and motorized intrusions occur within the burned area, temporary fencing would be installed along this same area.

Consideration of Critical Elements and Resources:

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternative:

ACECs
Environmental Justice
Farmlands, prime or unique
Wastes, hazardous/solid
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

Critical elements and resources brought forward for analysis:

A. Air Quality:

The burned area would be susceptible to wind erosion until revegetation occurs. Wind erosion can increase Particulate Matter #10 (PM#10) emissions causing exceedence of PM #10 air quality standards which can negatively affect human health. In addition, airborne dust can cause visibility and safety problems on roads in the area. The proposed vegetation and erosion control treatments would encourage regrowth of vegetation, thus reducing future potential air quality impacts.

B. Cultural Resources:

The Tabor Creek Fire occurred within an area known to archaeologists as the Central Great Basin which has been inhabited by humans for approximately 12,000 years.

Archaeological sites and cultural properties in this area must be afforded protection whenever possible. Section 106 of the Natural Historic Preservation Act mandates that the federal government would account for cultural resources in its projects and undertakings, including fire rehabilitation efforts. Ground disturbing activities such as drill seeding, dozer line rehabilitation, and fence construction could damage cultural sites. Therefore, areas designated for mechanized seeding and other ground disturbance would be inventoried for cultural resources before the disturbance occurs in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement Between BLM, Nevada and the Nevada State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO). At a minimum, to reduce potential impacts to cultural resources, activities that involve mechanized surface disturbance of less than 10 cm depth would generally have transect spacing of 100 meters. More intense inventory will be used for highly sensitive areas. If surface disturbance is greater than 10 cm, then 30 meter transect intervals would be used.

All cultural resources discovered or relocated will be plotted on maps and at a minimum would be recorded on the Nevada IMACS short form. Resources except those previously determined not eligible, by BLM and SHPO, or that have been fully mitigated, would be flagged for avoidance and avoided during rehabilitation activities. Flagging would be placed to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism and removed as soon as possible.

C. Native American Religious Concerns:

By law, policy and executive order, BLM is required to undertake a good-faith consultation process with regional Native American tribal and band governments prior to projects that might affect Native American sacred areas, Traditional Cultural Properties or other traditional values. Native Americans would be consulted as appropriate prior to any ground disturbing activities or herbicide treatments. If the BLM obtains information identifying Traditional Cultural Properties or other areas having traditional or religious significance, then the BLM would insure that reasonable measures are taken to avoid impacts to these areas of concern to Native Americans.

D. Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Sensitive Species:

No threatened or endangered plant species are known to occur in the burn area. An historic northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) nest is located just outside the burn to the northeast. The sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been designated by the BLM Nevada State Director as a sensitive species and therefore afforded the same protection as a candidate species. Although the suspected causes of sage grouse decline are numerous, loss of habitat, including loss by fire, ranks at the top of the list. Rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat, and the prevention of invasion by fire-prone

annual weeds such as cheatgrass, is a wildlife priority of both BLM and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The proposed seeding treatments and rest from grazing pressure are designed to restore sagebrush habitat and/or reduce the impacts from the invasion or reinvasion of fire-prone annual weeds.

E. Migratory Birds

The proposed restorative actions are located in a sagebrush habitat type. The Nevada Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan identifies the following bird species associated with this physiographic region: sage grouse (obligate), black rosy finch, ferruginous hawk, gray flycatcher, loggerhead shrike,
vesper sparrow, prairie falcon, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, Swainson's hawk, burrowing owl, calliope hummingbird, Brewer's sparrow, Western meadowlark, black-throated sparrow, lark sparrow, green-tailed towhee, Brewer's blackbird, horned lark, and lark sparrow.

The greatest threat to these sagebrush-dependant migratory bird species is type conversion of sagebrush communities. Maintaining complete, diverse sagebrush communities is integral to conservation efforts for these species. Low elevation sagebrush sites, such as the project area, are vulnerable to conversion to cheatgrass types following wildfire. The proposed action to reseed with aggressive perennial grasses to prevent cheatgrass from dominating the site, coupled with secondary efforts to re-establish sagebrush on the stabilized site (as necessary) should provide beneficial impacts to these species and is consistent with the conservation measures listed in Section 3(e) of the President's Migratory Bird Executive Order.

F. Visual Resources:

The proposed project treatment area is primarily within Visual Resource Management Class IV with a small burned area near the Tabor Creek Campground which is in Class II. The objective of a Class IV area is to provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. Within Class IV VRM areas, management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements. The objective of a Class II area is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Within Class II VRM areas, management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Both the fire itself and fire suppression activities such as creation of dozer lines have resulted in visual impacts to the area. Revegetation efforts are designed to blend into the background without attracting undue attention and aid in restoring the area to a more characteristic landscape. Seeding the burned areas and dozer lines would serve to reduce the visual impacts in the area. By signing the burned area around the Tabor Creek Campground to discourage vehicular use of the

area, vegetation would have a better chance to regrow and minimize long-lasting visual impacts.

G. Wildlife:

Wildlife was adversely impacted by the Tabor Creek Fire primarily through temporary loss of habitat through removal of vegetation by the fire. The proposed rehabilitation treatments include resting the area from livestock grazing, and seeding several areas with seed mixtures conducive to wildlife use. In particular, proposed seedings are specifically designed to benefit sage grouse, antelope, and mule deer. In addition, aerial and drill seeding of lower elevation areas will help establish shrub species that would out compete exotic invading plant species, as well as provide critical forage and cover.

H. Grazing:

The proposed closures to grazing within the burned area would protect seeding efforts and aid in natural revegetation of burned public rangeland, while reducing the potential for future noxious weed and cheatgrass infestations. A grazing closure would also improve future forage conditions for both livestock and wildlife. However, grazing closure and relocation of livestock would have some short term adverse impacts on ranchers in the area who normally use the allotment for grazing. The actual AUM losses suffered by ranchers have not been determined at this point. Through field inventories and monitoring, GIS analyses, and consultation, cooperation, and coordination with individual permittees, specific rest periods and other grazing management options would be identified to reduce impacts to ranchers where possible.

I. Water Quality, surface/ground:

Increased water erosion could occur on steeper slopes due to lack of vegetation to slow runoff and stabilize soils. This may cause a temporary increase in sedimentation to Pole Creek and its tributaries which are incised and may supply excess sediment from eroding banks. Suspended sediments should return to normal once revegetation occurs. Tabor Creek is a Nevada Division of Water Resources Class A stream, or Class I, highly significant. This stream is not expected to be impacted because the fire intensity was low and the fire burned in mosaics within the Tabor Creek watershed. There is also an adequate buffer of live vegetation surrounding the stream. The proposed watershed seedings and rest from grazing would allow for a faster recovery of vegetation to reduce any future erosion hazard within the watersheds since burned areas have a higher risk of flash floods in narrow drainages. A flood hazard warning sign would warn users of roads in drainages along Pole Creek of potential mudflows.

J. Invasive, Nonnative Species:

Fire suppression efforts, including dozer line construction and use of engines and other mechanized vehicles, may have introduced noxious weed species seeds, particularly Canada thistle, into the burned area. In order to reduce the potential impacts of an invasion of noxious

weeds, chemical treatment of existing Canada thistle stands should be implemented and subsequent monitoring should be conducted after rehabilitation treatments are completed. If noxious weeds are discovered to have invaded the burn area, further herbicide treatments would need to be implemented to reduce the spread of the noxious weeds. The proposed noxious weed monitoring would help to prevent or reduce noxious weed invasions of the Tabor Creek burn area.

K. Floodplains:

The Flood Insurance Rate Map is not available for the burned area. The fire did not reach the area of the 100-year floodplain along Tabor Creek. The floodplains along Pole Creek and its tributaries are now lacking vegetation to filter sediment and slow runoff. This could cause erosion in the drainage bottoms. Watershed seedings and rest from livestock would encourage revegetation of riparian and floodplain areas.

L. Forest Resources:

Forest resources impacted by this fire included quaking aspen, mountain mahogany, and limber pine. The mountain mahogany and limber pine are in higher elevations that are fairly steep and rocky which make them fairly inaccessible to grazing by ungulates. Natural regeneration for this species should occur without management actions. The quaking aspen is also thought to be in locations favorable to natural regeneration without management actions other than deferred grazing for 2 to 3 years. One stand is, however, in an area easily accessible to livestock and was in a deteriorated condition prior to the burn. The proposed exclosure for this stand should help to sustain the stand's regeneration over an extended period of time.

M. Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts for proposed Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation treatments are discussed in the programmatic Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NFRPEA) BLM/EK/PL2000/037, which is available for review at the BLM Elko Field Office.

Project Cost Summary: (the cost summary information can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

Project Maps: (project maps can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

Cost/Risk Assessment: (the cost/risk assessment can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

Native/Nonnative Worksheet: (the native/nonnative worksheet can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)